Human Nature, Personality, and Human Freedom in Feng Qi's *On Wisdom*

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In creating his theory of wisdom, Feng Qi emphasizes that Chinese Marxist philosophy should move from the theory of knowledge to a discourse on wisdom and concentrate on Chinese people's living world and life existence, so as to provide a spiritual home for the Chinese people and thereby highlight the importance of human nature, personality, and human freedom in Chinese Marxist philosophy. In researching human nature, he expatiates on the problems of mind (xin) and human nature (xing), natural instincts (tian xing) and virtues (de xing), and general character and individual character; in emphasizing personality, he puts forward the idea that the ideal personality is "free personality as a member of ordinary people;" in probing into the problems of human freedom, he explains how to get freedom from the basis of practical materialism. This philosophical inquiry enriches Chinese Marxist philosophy's researches into the understanding of humanity and the connection of philosophy with the living world, which opens up a new area of development in the sinicization of Marxist philosophy.

Keywords: Feng Qi, *On Wisdom*, human nature, personality, freedom, Chinese Marxist philosophy

Feng Qi (1915-1995) finished his *Three Discourses on Wisdom—Knowing the World and Knowing the Self, Dialectics of Logical Thinking and Human Freedom, and Truth, Goodness and Beauty*—in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. These works took Marxist practical materialism as their foundation and created a new system of Marxist philosophy by explaining the history of Chinese philosophy and drawing upon its resources. This paper will discuss his explanation of human nature, personality, and human freedom in *On Wisdom* and show his contribution to development in the sinicization of Marxist philosophy.

1. Key Points of *On Wisdom*: From Understanding the World to Knowing the Self

During the long period in which political life and revolutionary struggle were the central elements in Chinese life, the focus of Chinese Marxist philosophy centered on issues concerning knowing and transforming the world. This resulted in Mao's theory of knowledge entitled *On Practice*. Since the late 1970s, economic life has come to replace political life and revolutionary struggle in importance and has become the center of Chinese life. This has required Chinese Marxist philosophy to focus greater attention on the issues of knowing

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oneself, settling one's soul, and providing a spiritual home for Chinese people in their daily lives. *On Wisdom* was a product of this time.

Feng began to form his *On Wisdom* in the 1970s and 1980s. This was an era in which Chinese philosophers placed research on the theory of knowledge at the center of philosophy. Feng was heavily influenced by the trend of this era, and *On Wisdom* took the theory of knowledge as its starting point to elucidate his new understanding of Marxist philosophy. Nevertheless, he also felt that it was difficult to include the Chinese people's life world and lived existence in the traditional theory of knowledge, and that it was not enough simply to provide a spiritual home for the Chinese people; instead, he thought Chinese Marxist philosophy should focus on issues of the spiritual world and, therefore, also shift its focus from a theory of knowledge to ontology in order to establish a link between knowledge and wisdom. This resulted in Feng attempting to expand the scope of the theory of knowledge in *On Wisdom* and escape the limits of the theory of knowledge in order to form something he called "epistemology," namely, a "generalized theory of knowledge." He hoped through "epistemology" both to explore the theory of knowledge and to study theories concerning wisdom. Chinese Marxist philosophy can take the life world, lived existence, and the spiritual home of Chinese people as its important content, therefore truly penetrating the inner world and spiritual life of the contemporary Chinese people.

Feng starts by researching the history of philosophy and gives "epistemology" profound consideration. In his view, "epistemology" includes understanding the world and understanding the self. In the history of philosophy, these two points have centered around four questions: First, can our senses provide access to objective reality? This problem is whether sensory experiences reflect objective reality. Second, can theoretical thinking arrive at scientific laws? This problem is to probe into the possibility of gaining universal and necessary knowledge. Third, can logical thinking grasp concrete truth? This problem looks for ways to grasp human nature (xing) and the heavenly way (tian dao) or laws of nature. Fourth, can people be free, or is it possible to cultivate a free personality or ideal personality? This question emphasizes that the aim of philosophy is to cultivate human personality. Of these, the first two questions are primarily related to questions of knowledge: How do people arrive at knowledge from ignorance? The latter two are questions of wisdom: How do people arrive at wisdom from knowledge? Humans arrive at wisdom by moving from knowing the world to knowing the self, and then human freedom. That is to say, the process of human knowledge includes understanding the world and understanding the self. It is a dialectical movement from ignorance to knowledge, from knowledge to wisdom. With this, Feng breaks through the limitations of the traditional theories of knowledge that arrives at wisdom from knowledge, by arriving at an understanding of the self from an understanding of the external world.

Feng also points out that, from the perspective of the history of philosophy, Western philosophers have given more thought to the preceding two questions, with a focus on exploring issues related to knowledge, whereas Chinese philosophers have tended to give more thought to the latter two questions, with a focus on exploring issues related to wisdom. Even on the latter two questions, there have been significant differences in Western and Chinese philosophical thinking. Thus, when writing *On Wisdom*, Feng pays particular attention to explaining the history of Chinese philosophy and drawing upon its resources. To this end, he wrote two works on the history of Chinese philosophy. One is *Logical Development of Ancient Chinese Philosophy*, which discusses the development of ancient Chinese philosophy from the pre-Qin period to the Ming and Qing dynasties. The other is *The Revolutionary Process of Modern Chinese Philosophy*, which discusses the

transformation of Chinese philosophy from its ancient to modern forms and the development of a new form of Chinese philosophy between 1840 and 1949.

2. The Purpose of Knowing the Self: From Knowing Human Nature to Perfecting Virtue

Feng Qi believes that the philosophical aim of understanding the self is perfecting human nature. The understanding of human nature is a process that a spiritual subject itself develops and thus perfects itself by virtue of a free personality. He stated,

Knowing the self means knowing the natural character of humanity (both as a group and individuals) as a spiritual subject. The spiritual subject is the soul. Human nature undergoes a process of development from natural instincts to virtue, which is related to the in-itself and for-itself process of the spirit. As such, knowing the self is the same as knowing one's soul, one's virtue, and the relationship between the two.¹ (1996, 354)

Feng Qi further points out that the aim of knowing the self and cultivating virtue is to attain individual freedom and perfect a free personality that unifies the characteristics of truth, goodness, and beauty. This is the overall aim of knowing the self. He stated, "The overall aim of humankind is to attain a state of freedom and truth, goodness, and beauty, so that nature helps the development of human nature, society becomes a commonwealth of free individuals, and the spirit becomes a free personality that unifies truth, goodness, and beauty" (1996, 110-111).²

As a result, Feng suggests that questions of human nature, personality, and human freedom are the main questions in discussions concerning knowledge of the self. In *On Wisdom*, he focuses on and explains these questions. In his view, human nature is the most fundamental question, and questions of personality and human freedom arise on the basis of it. Therefore, he first considers in depth the question of human nature, and discusses the relationship between the mind (xin) and human nature (xing), natural instincts and moral character, and general and individual character. He discusses these in depth, and they constitutes the main elements of his thinking on the question of human nature.

3. Feng's First Thought About Human Nature: Mind and Human Nature

Feng believes that people's knowledge of themselves is first of all related to the relationship between the mind and human nature. The "mind" (xin) refers to the consciousness of a person as the subject of knowledge, or the spiritual subject. He says, "Human consciousness should not only grasp human nature itself, but also understand and evaluate the natural world and its order" (1996, 360).³ "Human nature" (xing) refers to the essence of man as objects of knowledge. As Feng puts it, "The essence of man, humanity's in-being, is not only about the soul's awareness, but also includes unconscious and irrational forces, as well as characteristics of labor, sociality, and demands for freedom" (1996, 360).⁴ The relationship between the mind and human nature is also the relationship between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge in the course of knowing the self. This relationship is actually based on man itself, the consciousness of man as subject as well as object of knowledge, in which the subject considers itself a person. This is a special kind of "subject-object" relationship.

Feng points out that man's comprehension of himself develops from this type of subject-object relationship, which has a fairly complex content: both the conscious awareness of the mind toward human nature and the self-improvement of human nature during this type of conscious activity, as well as the freedom of human nature that follows self-improvement. As Feng stated,

Knowing oneself not only refers to knowledge of consciousness as an subject, but also refers to man's considering itself (the subject itself) as the object in exploring their essential strength—including human conscious and unconscious abilities, rationality and irrationality, as well as humans' carrying out labor and forming social relations. Moreover, man, not only explores its essential strength, but also actively takes human nature as the basis for shaping its own virtue. Man's self is a process from in-itself to for-itself. It has both consciousness as a spiritual subject (soul), as well as being the self-fulfilling and free development of man's essential strength (human nature as virtue).⁵ (1996, 362)

On the one hand, Feng has here learned from and is drawing upon the theory of the mind and human nature from ancient Chinese philosophy. On the other hand, he does not support the fact that ancient Chinese philosophy does not take ontology as its starting point in drawing a strict distinction between the mind and human nature, but rather advocates taking the theory of knowledge as the starting point in understanding the relationship between the mind and human nature.

4. Feng's Second Thought About Human Nature: Natural Instincts and Virtue

Feng then analyzes human nature and points out that it includes natural instincts and virtue. Natural instincts are the endowments that humanity is given by nature. Virtue, however, is how a person's natural instincts are shaped by ethics and morals. Human instincts obviously include animal instincts and biological instincts from nature. These elements also belong to the category of human nature. But a more important and innate element of human nature is to transform natural instincts and cultivate virtue in the course of interactions between labor and consciousness, and between practice and theory.

When touching upon the transformation of natural instincts and the cultivation of virtue, Feng proceeds from and elaborates upon the view of Wang Fuzhi, the late Ming and early Qing philosopher, that "nature is not simply what one is endowed with at birth; it is also what is developed throughout one's life." Feng points out,

On the one hand, "life is received but human nature is formed"—humans accept what nature gives them and are constantly influenced by nature; on the other hand, humans can also weigh things up and make choices, and form habits and likes and dislikes in the course of events. Therefore, in the course of forming human nature, man is not completely passive.⁶ (1996, 376)

In Feng's view, human nature is not determined by natural instincts but is gradually formed in the course of the transformation of natural instincts, and humanity can play a dynamic role in transforming natural instincts and shaping human nature. Nor are man's virtues determined by natural instincts, but are formed in the course of transforming natural instincts and nurturing moral character. They are the result of changing natural instincts into virtues.

Feng goes on to stress that transforming natural instincts and nurturing virtue are not about completely denying natural instincts, but about striving to change natural instincts into virtue and improving natural instincts through virtue. Feng says, "Man must revert to nature. In the course of the interplay between practice and consciousness, humanity's natural instincts develop into moral character, and their understanding of themselves (including self-attesting of the self as the conscious subject) increases" (1996, 390).⁷ He also says, "The essence of man is a process of historical development and is not immutable. This type of development, from natural instincts to virtue, is the process that countless individuals experience" (1996, 41).⁸

In short, between natural instincts and virtue, Feng gives greater weight and emphasizes to virtue. On this point, he again illustrates the difference between *On Wisdom* and modern Western philosophy, and emphasizes deeper elements of ancient Chinese philosophy.

5. Feng's Third Thought About Human Nature: General Character and Individual Character

Feng believes that to gain a deeper comprehension of virtue and explain its formation, it is necessary to understand the relationship between man's individual and general character, and highlight man's individual character on the basis of a profound comprehension of man's general character. Man's general character refers to what Marx called "Gattungswesen" (species-essence), which is humankind's fundamental nature, as distinct from other animals. Feng states, "When speaking of human nature, it is important to note that man has a different nature and characteristics from beasts, such as rationality, consciousness, the ability to work and establish social systems, and ethics and morals—these are all unique to humans, and they are of a universal general character" (1996, 358).⁹ Individual character refers to particularities of individual or, in other words, the character that makes each person different from the rest. On this point, Feng states, "More importantly, we should deal with persons as living individuals... The moral behavior and aesthetic feelings of humans include the premise that persons should be treated as individuals. We require of ourselves that we shape ourselves according to our ambitions and cultivate ourselves into free personalities and free individuals" (1996, 359).¹⁰

Feng points out that the relationship between individual and general character is a major question in the history of philosophy, and philosophers in the past had used essentialism to separate the two. This has caused the concept of general character to become abstract and lose its concreteness. As a result, they only discussed humanity's general character but not its individual character, as they believed that only its general character was real and individual character was not. This led to an abstract theory of human nature. Rationalism and empiricism in the history of philosophy exhibited the same defect. Rationalists one-sidedly attributed human nature to reason, denied the experiential characteristics of human nature, and therefore also denied the significance of the existence of experience in human nature. Empiricists looked at the experiences of individuals, but thought that the experience of individuals only existed in a biological sense and that there were no individuals with general character. This showed that both rationalists and empiricists were one-sided and abstract in their explanations of human nature. To overcome this one-sidedness and abstraction in the theory of human nature, it is necessary to use dialectical practical materialism to clarify the dialectics of general and individual character.

Feng makes use of Marx's view that "the essence of man, ... is the ensemble of all social relationships" to elucidate the dialectics of humanity's general and individual character. He believes that Marx's view contains three levels of meaning concerning the relationship between general and individual character. First, Marx's view affirms the general character of humanity in an anthropological sense. He stresses that the general character is the essence of humanity, that it has different character compared with animals, and that its character is not governed by a single rational or conscious element but by a sociability that can integrate these elements. Second, Marx's view also takes as its premise the affirmation of the individual character of humanity. Here, the individual character of humanity refers to socialized and free individuals as well as individuals that have received moral principles and have personal aesthetic feelings. This type of person can shape himself or herself according to his or her ambitions and cultivate a free personality or free individual character. Third, Marx's view emphasizes that general and individual character are developed historically, and the creation of individual character is the product of the development of the general character to a certain stage, as well as a measure of the development of the essence of humans. This idea is fully demonstrated in Marx's *Critique of Political*

Economy (Draft 1857-1858). In this work, Marx divides the formation and deepening of the essence of humans into three stages and three corresponding forms:

The first stage, from a primitive society to a feudal society, is dominated by the natural economy, and the basic characteristic is the dependence relationships of man; in the second stage, where society is dominated by the commodity economy, man become more independent, but they also become more dependent on things; in the third stage, man overcomes his dependence on each other and things and establish a communist society. Under a communist society, individual freedoms develop into a commonwealth, or as Li Dazhao put it, the emancipation of the individual and the great harmony of society.¹¹ (1996, 398)

Feng believes that these three stages show that the acquisition of sociability in individual character is only possible after overcoming man's dependence on other men and things. These dependent relationships cause alienation; therefore, overcoming them is the abandonment of alienation, which will allow man to achieve personal liberation and realize its human essence. This is the dialectical and historical unity of general character and individual character.

Feng points out that elucidating the dialectics of the general and individual character of humanity is particularly important for transforming the traditional Chinese theory of human nature. For a long time, Chinese talked about human subjectivity and national consciousness, and the spirit of the times and class—consciousness, but rarely talked about individual character or in particular the principle of being conscious and willing. Because they did not talk about individuals and attach importance to individual character, for a long time, Chinese's national consciousness did not take shape and could not develop. As a result, in order to develop democracy in China, Chinese Marxist philosophy needed to study individual character and correctly understand the dialectical relationship between general and individual character.

From the above thoughts on Feng Qi's view of human nature, we discover that his analysis of the three levels of relationships (mind and human nature, natural instincts and virtue, and general character and individual character) is actually a progressive logical relationship. In his observations on mind and human nature, Feng introduced the theory of knowledge and established the principle of the subjectivity of human nature. In his observations on natural instincts and virtue, he achieved the transition from the theory of knowledge to the theory of human nature, and viewed the formation of human nature as a process from natural instincts to virtue. In his observations of general and individual character, he deepened his description of virtue, and suggested that the supreme principle of virtue was human freedom, or human freedom based on individual character. Thus, in Feng's view, human nature is not only an expression of the historical process of a society; it is also the process of the formation of the individual character of humanity. This is the theoretical basis for his views on issues of personality.

6. Exploring Questions of Personality Starting From Questions of Human Nature

Feng believes that the development of natural instincts into virtue creates the personality of individuals, and that the cultivation of an individual's personality is the greatest purpose of natural instincts as they develop into virtue and the most profound element of the theory of human nature. Thus, he reveals the internal link among virtue, individual characteristics, and personality, and further explores questions of personality by taking questions of human nature as his starting point.

In Feng's view, questions of personality are related to virtue. As such, they are not just questions of the theory of knowledge, but of ethics. In an ethical sense, he defines the concept of "personality" as follows:

“‘personality’ is often just used to refer to as a subject with virtue.”¹² His study of human nature mainly revolves around the question of how to perfect a “subject with virtue.” As such, his study of human nature evolves from the theory of knowledge to ethics.

In Feng's view, “subjects with virtue” does not mean abstract man in a general sense, but rather people with ideals who strive to practice them. People have ideals and shape their own according to their ideals into “subjects with virtue.” Therefore, whether or not people have ideals and whether or not they pursue them become the standard that determines whether they have virtue and personality. It is in this sense that Feng views a “free personality” as an ideal and truly valuable personality. This is because “the activities of a free person is achieving ideals from reality and activities that change ideals into reality” (1996, 9).¹³ Conversely, “a hypocrite, philistine, and traitor is the person who has lost his personality” (1996, 9).¹⁴ Here, Feng particularly emphasizes that a free personality has the aim of transforming natural instincts and cultivating virtue, and he believes that one could not depart from this aim when talking about transforming natural instincts and cultivating virtue.

7. Free Personality as a Member of Ordinary People

Feng goes on to point out that the free personality that Chinese Marxist philosophy pursues should obviously be inherited from the ancient Chinese philosophical tradition of attaching importance to the ideal personality, but at the same time should also have its own characteristics. This is known as having a “free personality as a member of ordinary people.” As Feng puts it, “Philosophers of the past talked about sages and heroes differently from ordinary people and a small number of people able to extricate themselves from common tethers, but we now talk about having a free personality as a member of ordinary people being something everyone can perfect” (1996, 325).¹⁵

Feng believes this type of “free personality as a member of ordinary people” has two features: One is the characteristic of ordinary people and the other is individuality. These two features express the pursuit of personality that is different from that in ancient China, particularly Confucianism. The pursuit of personality doesn't demand each person to become a sage or hero, nor does it acknowledge the ultimate meaning of consciousness and the absolute sense of freedom. Rather, it is about normal people moving toward the unified realm of freedom of truth, goodness, and beauty in the course of normal events. This type of free personality is something most people can perfect. As Feng puts it,

The new person we want to cultivate is an ordinary person with a free personality. It does not require cultivation of an omniscient and omnipotent sage, nor does it acknowledge the ultimate meaning of consciousness and the absolute sense of freedom. One cannot deify people. People are ordinary. People have shortcomings and make mistakes, but demanding freedom and free labor is the essence of humans. People always demand the ideal realm of unified truth, goodness, and beauty. This realm is not a distant metaphysical realm. Ideals and freedom are a process, in which a free personality develops.¹⁶ (1996, 309-310)

Individualism expresses an attitude toward species-being that is different from that in ancient China, particularly of Confucianism. It also reflects the connection between the essence of species-being and history, but first demands the person to become an individually free personality. Feng states,

We now talk about a free personality being a member of ordinary people and something that most people can perfect. This type of personality also reflects the connection between the essence of species-being and history, but first demands becoming an individual with a free personality. An individual with a free personality is not only an element of a

species-being and a cell of social connection; it has a unique coherency and firmness. This unique nature makes it different from other similar elements, and it maintains its uniqueness amid numerous social connections. The 'I' is the value I created or the spiritual realm I enjoy is a master. 'I' dominates this field, and these creations and this value are creations of my spirit. They are expressions of my spirit.¹⁷ (1996, 320-321)

Therefore, on the one hand, the "free personality as a member of ordinary people" advocated by Feng is linked to the importance attached to personality by ancient Chinese philosophers, while on the other hand, it is different from them.

Feng Qi reviews discussions regarding the ideal personality in Chinese philosophy and stresses that the "free personality as a member of ordinary people" has deep roots in the history of philosophy. He points out that discussions regarding the ideal personality in ancient China revolve around whether or not humans could become sages. In modern times, Chinese philosophers raised the issue of cultivating a new person, which meant that the ideal personality talked about by Chinese philosophers changed from being a sage to being a new person. The personality of this new person was a "free personality as a member of ordinary people." As Feng states,

The ideal personality spoken of by modern philosophers is no longer the "selfless", "desire-less", and "emotionless" sage, but a free personality as a member of ordinary people—it is an ordinary independent personality and individual character that pursues freedom. Though it inevitably has all sorts of shortcomings, it nevertheless demands emancipation of the individual and demands a 'new person' with its own true nature.¹⁸ (1996, 379)

In other words, "A free personality as a member of an ordinary person is the demand for cultivating a new person, which is different from the demand of the ancients to make persons into sages and heroes. The modernist's ideal personality is not unattainable, but it can be perfected by ordinary people through hard work" (1996, 309).¹⁹

With regard to this new ideal personality, Feng is a strong proponent of China's first Marxist, Li Dazhao. Feng once commented,

Li Dazhao used a Marxist point of view to resolve the relationship between the individual and the group, and he stressed the unity of rational individualism and rational socialism. He thought true freedom is freedom in the midst of order, and that true order is order between free persons. This personality, which unifies rational individualism and rational socialism, should be cultivated in the course of labor and revolutionary struggle. He believed that this personality was the result of workers seeking liberation, and not about rulers and authority figures' forgiveness.²⁰ (1996, 306-307)

Therefore, his belief in a "free personality as a member of ordinary people" is a direct continuation of the ideas of modern philosophers concerning cultivating new people, and it is particularly a continuation of the ideas of Li Dazhao and other Chinese Marxist pioneers.

8. From Discussing Questions of Personality to Discussing Questions of Freedom

In Feng's view, the questions of personality raised in *On Wisdom* not only have an epistemological and ethical connotation, but also an ontological one. Feng states, "Philosophers talk about the ideal personality and give this ideal personality an ontological connotation, which unifies ontology and the theory of wisdom" (1996, 319).²¹

Feng believes that the view of a "free personality as a member of ordinary people" which he advocates has this ontological connotation. The ordinariness and individuality of the "free personality as a member of ordinary people" means the subject, "I" is not only an aware subject, but also a valuable subject, and therefore

has ontological connotations. That is not to say that "I" has the same nature as material substance, but that "I" as a free personality, exhibits the consistency and firmness of spirit, makes evaluations, and creates and exhibits its value. "Here the spirit is the substance and value is the function, so the free individual character, as we say, has ontological connotation" (1996, 321).²² Therefore, he concludes that, "The free personality that has ontological connotation is a comprehensively developed personality that unifies knowledge, will, and feelings, as well as truth, goodness, and beauty" (1996, 325).²³ In this way, he goes from the question of personality to the question of freedom.

When it comes to exploring questions of freedom, Feng first of all analyzes the concept of "freedom." He points out that "freedom" is not only a political concept, but also a category of philosophy. The questions of freedom discussed in *On Wisdom* are related to the theory of freedom in a philosophical sense. Feng states, "My main point is that the freedom of humanity lies in unifying truth, goodness, and beauty" (1996, 1-2).²⁴ He also states, "Freedom is to perfect human ideals. It is in the activity of freedom that people derive ideals from reality and change ideals into reality. During this type of activity, people feel free, or rather, they attain freedom" (1996, 3).²⁵

Feng also points out that in different domains of philosophy, the concept of "freedom" has different meanings:

From the perspective of the theory of knowledge, freedom is used to transform the world based on truthful knowledge; that is, it is the realization of scientific ideals constituting predictions of real possibilities integrated with people's demands. From the perspective of ethics, freedom means a choice based on a free will and conscious behavior, and thus results in the realization of moral ideals that reflect the progress of human demands. From the perspective of aesthetics, freedom lies in man's own intuitive nature, and aesthetics is realized by man pouring his emotions into vivid images.²⁶ (1996, 27-28)

Although the meaning of these concepts of "freedom" is different, there are some consistencies. Namely, freedom is always about transforming the practical possibility and demand to fulfill our own essence into reality. Only when man attains freedom can he have a real personality.

9. Man Attains Freedom

How does man attain freedom? This is a question Feng considers as a great deal in *On Wisdom*. He believes that, from the perspective of Marxist practical materialism, freedom, in a philosophical sense, is not abstract but concrete. This concreteness lies in the fact that the basis of freedom is the freedom of labor, the process of freedom is the development of history, and the condition of freedom is man's comprehensive development. As Feng puts it,

According to the view of Marx and Engels, the leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom includes two aspects. First, in the field of material production, production must be carried out according to the laws of science and under the conditions that fit human nature. Second, on the basis of highly developed material production, man develops his creative talents and qualities in many areas for his own purpose, so that they achieve development in itself and for itself.²⁷ (1996, 31)

Conversely, "If an individual character is not comprehensively developed, then it is not free development" (1996, 326).²⁸ Here, a person's comprehensive development means:

On the basis of highly developed productive forces, he has sufficient leisure time to inherit and develop all valuable culture, including the methods of communication of science, art, and civilization (including ethical relationships), and at the same time he develops his rationality, will power, and imagination to liberate all aspects of his creative talents and genuinely be in itself and for itself.²⁹ (1996, 31)

In other words, "The free development of human nature is also the comprehensive development of man's mental and physical, rational and irrational aspects (instincts, feelings, will, etc.)" (1996, 131).³⁰ In Feng's view, there is even a comprehensive development issue with labor itself. He states, "As a skill of labor, to truly become a musician, one must unify truth, goodness, beauty, knowledge, will, and feelings" (1996, 326).³¹

Feng also points out that, although achieving freedom requires the above conditions, these need to be resolved through the entire history of humankind rather than being something each individual can have on their own. But that does not mean that man as individual cannot attain freedom. As an individual, it is possible to make "the leap from knowledge to wisdom" (*zhuan shi cheng zhi*)³² on the basis of one's own practice, to use the wisdom of one's virtue to grasp the infinite in the finite and grasp the absolute in the relative, and thereby relatively and conditionally attain freedom. Attaining this type of freedom—"a free personality as a member of ordinary people"—is something that all ordinary people can strive to achieve. In Feng's opinion, this "leap from knowledge to wisdom" includes the following three aspects.

First is "rational intuition." "Rational intuition" is comprehension. That is, intuition allows people to suddenly understand an entire meaning under the glow of rationality. This type of intuition not only exists in the areas of science, art, and morality, it also exists in people's understanding of themselves and their pursuit of wisdom. People can experience the infinite and absolute through a sudden understanding in the course of theoretical thinking. In this way, infinite and absolute human nature (*xing*) and the heavenly way (*tian dao*) are not elusive, but something that can be grasped using rational intuition. Feng states,

In the field of philosophy, if one talks about rational intuition, one must talk about how to concretely and vividly grasp the absolute, unconditional, and unlimited. The absolute, unconditional, and unlimited are things that are explored by philosophical theoretical thinking. In the course of inquiry, suddenly seizing something as a result of making the leap from knowledge to wisdom is "enlightenment" or rational intuition in philosophy.³³ (1996, 424)

Therefore, "rational intuition" is very important for achieving "the leap from knowledge to wisdom." In a certain sense, "In terms of perceptual activity of the interaction of human nature and the heavenly way, knowledge becoming wisdom is a type of rational intuition" (1996, 420).³⁴

Second is "dialectical synthesis." The things obtained from "rational intuition" no longer belong to experiences of the world, but have entered the "domain of the unspeakable," such as the unlimited heavenly way and free virtue, neither of which can be expressed in words. To express the content of the "domain of the unspeakable," it is necessary to use "dialectical synthesis," to move from the abstract to the concrete, and organically link laws and categories that have been discovered to grasp the whole process in this area. As Feng states,

The dialectically developmental law of knowledge is elevated from the concrete to the abstract, but this abstraction must then be elevated again to the concrete. The movement from the concrete to the abstract reveals variation in a certain area from some aspect. However, when a great deal of knowledge in some aspect accumulates to a certain point, knowledge is again elevated from the abstract to the concrete. When discovered laws and categories are organically linked, dialectical synthesis is carried out, and the whole process is grasped, then the concrete has been reached. The abstract is elevated again to the concrete, and it is also the unity of logic and history.³⁵ (1996, 436-437)

In Feng's opinion, "The logical system of *Das Kapital* is a type of dialectical synthesis. It corresponds to the development of history (the history of reality and the history of knowledge). It can be said to be a logical generalization and summary of historical evolution. It can also be said that its logical connection received systematic confirmation of historical facts" (1996, 437-438).³⁶

Third is the “self-fulfillment of virtue.” The so-called “self-fulfillment of virtue” refers to the reflection and validation of the subject’s own virtue. It is a conscious act of the subject. Feng points out that, although everybody has an “I”, it is nevertheless not easy for people to know their own face or temperament. People often deceive themselves and others, and conceal their true colors, making it difficult to accurately assess themselves. To truly know themselves, people must undergo training and cultivation. Through this process, they can test their own sincerity and virtue. This is not a subjective process, but rather a practical process. It is a process of the subjective being translated into the objective. As Feng puts it,

The virtue of the subject is in-itself and of-itself, and it is inseparable from the objective practical process of a thing-in-itself becoming a thing-for-us. Virtue is expressed as modality in the course of practice, and is thus objectified and visualized. Therefore, when we talk about self-fulfillment of virtue, it is not just about subjective acts and subjective experiences; it is covered in its own objective expression, such as if one’s words and deeds are the same, a sincere soul is self-knowing and self-fulfilling, and others can better judge and evaluate its objective expression.³⁷ (1996, 444)

In Feng’s view, realization of the “self-fulfillment of virtue” is the attainment of freedom by the individual. As a result, “I recognized the absolute and the infinite in the relative and finite” (1996, 445-446),³⁸ or in other words, relatively and conditionally obtained freedom. “Self-fulfillment of virtue” can particularly reflect the fundamental role of practice in making “the leap from knowledge to wisdom.”

In Feng’s work *On Wisdom*, “rational intuition,” “dialectical synthesis,” and “self-fulfillment of virtue” are simply understood as three inseparable aspects. But we believe these three aspects actually contain a progressive relationship, a relationship with layers of depth. Their form is evidently inspired by ancient Chinese philosophy. But their ideas are still based on practice, in particular, the “self-fulfillment of virtue” being obtained through practice. They all clearly demonstrate that Feng’s “leap from knowledge to wisdom” is still rooted in Marxist practical materialism.

10. Conclusion: Significance and Implications of Feng Qi’s *On Wisdom*

Feng’s revelations, deliberations, and discussions on human nature, personality, and human freedom in *On Wisdom* have wide-ranging significance and influence.

First, Feng’s *On Wisdom* is a new system of Marxist philosophy independently created by a dedicated philosopher. His revelations on human nature, personality, and human freedom not only show Feng’s personal understanding of Marxist philosophy, but also illustrate the way he inherits and draws upon Chinese philosophical resources and how he opens up a new area of development in the sinicization of Marxist philosophy.

Second, Feng’s deep deliberations regarding human nature, personality, and human freedom in *On Wisdom* not only establish a bridge between knowledge and wisdom, but also open up the ideas of people knowing themselves and pursuing wisdom, establish the theory of human nature in Chinese philosophy, and update the content and appearance of Chinese Marxist philosophy.

Third, Feng’s discussions of human nature, personality, and human freedom show that only by being based on these questions about human existence and the perfection of virtue and personality can Chinese Marxist philosophy genuinely enter the inner world and spiritual life of modern Chinese people, and provide a spiritual home for Chinese people to settle in and thus show its own vitality and influence. In this sense, Feng Qi’s *On Wisdom* has important implications for the development of Chinese Marxist philosophy in the 21st century.

Notes

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1. Feng Qi, *Knowing the World and Knowing the Self*, in *Collected Works of Feng Qi*, Vol. 1, East China Normal University Press, 1996, p. 354.
 2. Ibid., pp. 110-111.
 3. Ibid., p. 360.
 4. Ibid., p. 360.
 5. Ibid., p. 362.
 6. Ibid., p. 376.
 7. Ibid., p. 390.
 8. Feng Qi, *Human Freedom and Truth, Goodness and Beauty*, in *Collected Works of Feng Qi*, Vol. 3, East China Normal University Press, 1996, p. 41.
 9. Feng Qi, *Knowing the World and Knowing the Self*, p. 358.
 10. Ibid., p. 359.
 11. Ibid., p. 398.
 12. Feng Qi, *Human Freedom and Truth, Goodness and Beauty*, p. 9.
 13. Ibid., p. 9.
 14. Ibid., p. 9.
 15. Ibid., p. 325.
 16. Ibid., pp. 309-310.
 17. Ibid., pp. 320-321.
 18. Feng Qi, *Knowing the World and Knowing the Self*, p. 379.
 19. Feng Qi, *Human Freedom and Truth, Goodness and Beauty*, p. 309.
 20. Ibid., pp. 306-307.
 21. Ibid., p. 319.
 22. Ibid., p. 321.
 23. Ibid., p. 325.
 24. Ibid., pp. 1-2.
 25. Ibid., p. 3.
 26. Ibid., pp. 27-28.
 27. Ibid., p. 31.
 28. Ibid., p. 326.
 29. Ibid., p. 31.
 30. Ibid., p. 131.
 31. Ibid., p. 326.
 32. Feng Qi, *Knowing the World and Knowing the Self*, p. 418.
 33. Ibid., p. 424.
 34. Ibid., p. 420.
 35. Ibid., pp. 436-437.
 36. Ibid., pp. 437-438.
 37. Ibid., p. 444.
 38. Ibid., p. 445-446.

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